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ABSTRACT

In August 1983, when the second largest employer in Washington County, Maryland, closed its plant, the local unemployment rate was 13%. The following month, Hagerstown Junior College (HJC) received $50,000 in state funds to initiate a dislocated worker (DLW) program. The program included orientation by a counselor, diagnostic testing, and enrollment by the workers in credit or non-credit vocational programs. The displaced workers experienced a number of problems following their enrollment, including feelings of helplessness and hopelessness, difficulty in adapting to student life, and the constant need to look out for job opportunities. In recognition that it was not possible to develop the services this population needed through traditional college resources, the program was expanded later that fall. A 7-week "mini-mester" was developed for workers who were not able to enroll in the regular fall semester; a grant proposal sought funding for a DLW center to provide counseling, job survival skills, and a general support system; and a referral system among area service providers was developed. In spring 1984, 164 dislocated workers enrolled at HJC in vocational courses, regular credit programs, and specially designed short-term training programs. Some students were unable to complete the term as unemployment benefits ran out, and they were forced to take any available job. Lessons learned from the HJC experience underscored the importance of recruitment, support systems, program structure, and staff development. (HB)

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AN AGENDA FOR THE 90'S: STRATEGIES AND TACTICS FOR CONDUCTING AN EFFECTIVE DISLOCATED WORKER TRAINING PROGRAM

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Introduction

In eight months we will enter 1985, the mid-point of the 1980's. The shape of things to come for the rest of the decade is becoming apparent. Eighteen- to twenty-one-year-old students attending college will decline significantly through 1990. By the same year, the number of persons over twenty-five who are seeking postsecondary education will increase from 11 million to 22 million.[1] Secretary of Labor Raymond J. Donovan suggests that "Rapid technological changes are creating a new industrial revolution in the United States."[2] He proposes, further, that the major priority facing the nation is retraining people for the changing nature of available jobs. "Retraining is essential for workers as skills become obsolete, new industries rise, and competition...spurs more moves into new technologies."[3] Both conditions project major changes for community colleges.

In a period of dramatic, rapid technological change, community colleges must initiate partnerships with business and industry in the training and retraining of the labor force. Provision of workers for a high-tech society represents an avenue of growth for community colleges at a time when traditional sources of students are declining. It is necessary for institutions to recognize that traditional programs and services will not be effective in meeting the challenges of new students for new industries.

An essential component in the process of response is organizational adaptation. The concept has been described as modifications or alterations to the components of an institution in response to changes in the external environment.[4] As the Red Queen in Carroll's Alice in Wonderland so aptly put it, "...it takes all the running you can do to keep in the same place. If you want to get somewhere else, you must run at least twice as fast as that."[5]

In August 1983, Washington County, Maryland, was shocked when its second largest employer, Fairchild Republic, closed its local plant. Local unemployment rates were 13%. In September, Hagerstown Junior College (HJC) received $50,000 in JTPA Title III funds from the Maryland Department of Employment and Training to initiate a dislocated worker program. In October the college received another $50,000 to expand the program. The purpose of this presentation is to detail the organizational adaptations which produced an effective program.

Components of the HJC Program

The college quickly devised a system in order to provide classes for dislocated workers (DLW's). The components included cooperation with the local Department of Employment and Training and in-house coordination with Student Services, the Finance Office, the Office of Instruction, and the Office of Continuing Education.

Originally, the Registrar's Office handled the coordination of the DLW's with the Department of Employment and Training. The Registrar's Office, in September 1983, was dealing with the routine flow of credit students, and the additional burden created by the new program overburdened the system. The State Department of Employment and Training also placed a requirement of attendance forms for all students involved in the dislocated worker program. As a community college, HJC was not set up to maintain the attendance forms on all those involved in this special program. In the past the college had been involved in small CETA programs. A coordinator had been assigned to these programs to monitor attendance and coordinate with the local office. The same approach was used with the DLW program.

The intake component of the program included orientation by a counselor to available programs of study. For the fall semester, DLW's received diagnostic testing to determine their level of academic skills in math, reading, and English. Program staff used the testing package currently in place at the college. The reason for using this series was that the counseling staff was comfortable in interpreting data from this battery of tests. In most cases this testing package was quite adequate. It also gave the community useful data on the academic level of a segment of the adult population.

Upon completion of intake testing, the dislocated workers were referred to counselors for program advisement and registration. In most cases, dislocated workers enrolled in credit programs. However, 16% enrolled in Continuing Education courses of a vocational nature. The Department of Employment and Training required that the funds for tuition, fees, and books be used to train dislocated workers in fields where there were job possibilities. It was not possible, for example, to put a dislocated worker in a training course for aircraft assembly because in Washington County, Maryland, the aircraft industry is declining.

The administration of the college worked diligently to develop a workable system for the matriculation of dislocated workers. As mentioned above, the Department of Employment and Training required attendance forms on each DLW enrolled at the college. These attendance forms were signed weekly by each faculty member for each class attended. Cooperation by faculty in this project was solicited by the Dean of Instruction, division heads, and through communication with participating faculty members.

Beginning with enrollment at HJC, the dislocated workers experienced an array of problems directly related to their unemployed status. These problems

created a ripple effect throughout their lives. Although this population had a strong work ethic and work history, many, for the first time, were experiencing helplessness and hopelessness. Their only source of livelihood, "the plant," had closed and the employment outlook in Washington County was dismal in the fall of 1983. Workers lost health benefits, wages, and a sense of identity because of unemployment. They began to lose homes, cars, and other possessions, and savings were depleted. At the same time, some of the students were called back to work temporarily to assist in closing the Fairchild plant. The recall added to the confusion because they had to accept; to refuse work, however temporary, meant termination of unemployment benefits. These DLW's were forced to interrupt their educational plans.

Given this chaotic milieu, Hagerstown Junior College tried to run a fairly traditional education program and the DLW's attempted to adjust to the role of students. The program was shaped and remolded where possible to provide support and financial aide. However, it was not possible to develop the services this population needed through traditional college resources.

A month into the fall semester, it became obvious that if the DLW program were to survive, reorganization was essential. It was apparent that a coordinator for the program was needed who could work with the college staff as well as with local agencies, including the Department of Employment and Training, the JTPA office, and the Department of Social Services. The Director of Chapter II, Homemakers in Transition, a program established at HJC to serve nontraditional students, assumed reponsibility for the coordination of the DLW program. The choice was logical; the Chapter II staff had already developed working relationships with necessary community agencies, was familiar with special funding sources, and had been accepted within the HJC community.

Although 84 DLW's were able to enroll in fall classes, many other individuals were unable to meet registration deadlines. In order to meet their educational needs, a special enrollment design was developed. Five regular credit courses were condensed into a seven-week mini-mester, ending at the conclusion of the fall semester. The structure allowed this group to enroll in the regular spring semester beginning in January. Twenty-five DLW's enrolled in the fall mini-mester. Twenty-four completed classes. Some students registered for a full load, 10 credits. Others took only one credit. Students from the mini-mester quickly emerged as a group providing support and encouragement to one another. Classes ran a full day, 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday. Tuesday and Thursday classes were offered for a hour and a half in the morning. From the college's point of view, the mini-mester was a success. It met student needs and reflected a low dropout rate of 4% and a good rate of students enrolling in the spring semester. The students involved in the mini-mester appreciated getting credits quickly, but they also indicated that the intensity of the condensed session put them under stress.

With the spring semester approaching, many dislocated workers expressed concern about their unemployment benefits running out. Many wanted to remain in school, but with no visible means of support, had to look for work. Throughout the program, this one element--financial support--has been the major problem. Throughout the fall semester, DLW's were dropping out of the program because they needed money or panicked and felt they had to look for work.

The only DLW's who can afford to go to college for more than one semester are those with an income other than unemployment. The individual who is dislocated and is the sole source of family income is truly in need of retraining.

This individual, however, cannot afford to go to school. The person must take whatever job can be obtained in order to support self and family. There is a need to provide something other than unemployment benefits to workers if we are serious about retraining DLW's. Developing retraining programs that give careful consideration to local job market needs and the aptitudes of the individuals involved in retraining is essential.

Program Expansion

In the spring of 1984, 164 DLW's enrolled in classes at Hagerstown Junior College. Many enrolled in the regular credit program. Some took vocational courses through the Office of Continuing Education. Others enrolled in short-term training programs specifically designed for DLW's by the college. Thirteen individuals have dropped out of the college. A major concern in any successful program should be, "Is it doing what it is designed to do?" In most cases that goal is being accomplished. However, because there is no stipend to support the student through training, other than unemployment, some students never complete their program. Efforts are being made to expand the services offered to DLW's.

The local JTPA office and the United Auto Workers (UAW) wrote a grant to establish a DLW center to provide counseling, job survival skills, and a general support system. Working in cooperation with these agencies and others, HJC devised a referral system through a one-day seminar for area service providers. A seminar for DLW's will take place in May 1984 to provide information on job market outlook, where to go for health care, how to deal with finances, and making it through the unemployment ordeal emotionally.

The college's counseling staff was involved in the planning of the seminar for dislocated workers in May. Through their normal contact with the dislocated workers, the counselors were becoming more sensitive to the special needs of these adults and were able to see how they differed from the traditional students. One counselor was assigned specifically to work with the program coordinator in counseling groups regarding programs developed for DLW's. The college's Manpower Development Coordinator and the DLW Coordinator are working together to develop noncredit vocational education programs.

Parameters for a Successful Program

In her assessment, "The Displaced Worker: A New Challenge for Two-Year Colleges," Carol Eliason, Director of Development at the AACJC, suggests that "Community colleges...have discovered the need for multiple approaches to providing services and retraining for the dislocated worker of the 1980s."[6] The HJC experience bears out her statement. The approaches which she mentions can be grouped conveniently into four parameters.

First, dislocated workers are not likely to "just walk into" the college. To recruit effectively, colleges must use targeted marketing strategies including special newspaper advertising, direct mailings, networking with community groups including employment security offices, unions, social services, and service delivery area staffs. All of these strategies need to focus on presenting the college as a service-oriented, practical, helpful human enterprise. The result will be the emergence of the desired dislocated workers as students.

The second parameter to be considered after the DLW's become students is the support systems necessitated by their change in status. HJC found one-day orientation workshops useful. Their purpose is to portray the college as

a credible place, approachable and concerned about the needs of the DLW's. Articulate spokespersons for the college conduct entry-level advising. They make academic jargon comprehensible and assuage client concerns about their change in status. Finally, college personnel are identified who will continue to perform an advocacy role for the new students. Their presence and continuing support allows DLW's to develop a sense of identification with the college.

In an insightful essay describing the essentials of institutionalizing programs for nontraditional students, Joanne L. Pertz proposes that "A prime indicator of "institutionalization is...the institution's commitment to the program through appropriations of budget monies and assignment of faculty, staff, space, and equipment."[7] The third parameter, then, is program structure. A staff person must be assigned as director of the program. This individual structures the program, builds ongoing support for the DLW's within the college, and coordinates the myriad tasks which must be completed if the program is to succeed. The director needs to involve as many faculty and staff in the program as possible. HJC created a program steering committee composed of college personnel. They serve as agents for the program and communication links within the college. They help to create an identity for the program among members of the college community. Finally, the director must have direct access to the decisionmakers at the college, including the president. Without it, the individual will be unable to protect the program from political attacks and budget cuts. If the college cannot commit this level of resources to the DLW program, then success is unlikely.

Secretary of Labor Donovan articulates the seriousness of the challenges presented to the nation by the industrial retraining. "Only a concerted effort

"by schools, business, industry, and labor...will provide a satisfactory solution."[8] This challenge is unique in the recent history of the community college. Therefore, staff development for all college personnel to prepare them for new expectations is the fourth parameter. Training for all personnel in dealing with nontraditional learners is essential. The design does not need to be overly formal. The program director, working with experienced, sympathetic staff members, can conduct much of the training informally. Interactions with teachers assigned to the programs, steering committee activity, presentations at division meetings, and informal discussions over lunch can sensitize faculty and staff to the requirements of the program and the new students. Deans and the president can, through statement and action, emphasize the importance of the DLW program to the mission and economic health of the college. Finally, all staff must be encouraged to raise questions openly and seek solutions to emerging problems rather than complaining in private and allowing small difficulties to escalate into major ones. The result of these actions will be an effective, productive program.

Conclusion: A Rededication to the Community College Mission

In the 1960's it was commonplace for community college spokespersons to refer to a community college mission. The mission has been described in various ways but, generally, there was agreement that it meant meeting all potential clients at the point of their need and assisting them in fulfilling their potential.[9] In a recent assessment of the issues facing the community college, Vaughn proposes that "the community college has failed to achieve its full potential...and...to reach that potential leaders need to rekindle the enthusiasm and spirit of adventure that marked the community college

"during the 1960s and 1970s."[10] The issue of service to dislocated workers is a microcosm of this larger agenda.

If community colleges are to meet the needs of DLW's, then a number of actions are in order. It is essential to create educational options that are based on the needs of the nontraditional learner. Esoteric requirements having no intrinsic substance cannot be tolerated. The quality and integrity of degree requirements based on institutional standards cannot be compromised. However, the validity of different modes of learning and instruction to meet these standards must be designed. New marketing strategies and organizational structures must be devised that recognize that DLW's, and other nontraditional learners, do not respond to traditional recruitment and organizational practices. Also, emphasis must be placed on interpersonal communication and interaction strategies designed to promote feelings of self-confidence and acceptance in nontraditional learners. Adequate stipends must be provided to allow the DLW to complete retraining programs. The Maryland legislature is considering a bill which would provide a weekly stipend for the duration of the training. Finally, all members of the college community must become involved in the process of making the college into an open, accepting environment dedicated to meeting the needs of a diverse clientele.

If these actions are taken, Vaughn's enthusiasm and spirit of adventure will become a reality. HJC's experience with DLW's suggests that the effort required pays dividends in creating financial stability and a rededication to the community college mission. McCabe and Skidmore summarize the issue succinctly. "It is time once again for community colleges to do what they do best--to design innovative and diversified programs to meet the rapidly

"changing needs of society. Traditional approaches must be abandoned and basic reform undertaken to permit continuation of the open door. Through such strengthening and growth, this institution will retain its position of central importance in the future evolution of American society."[11] An effective dislocated worker program can serve as the first item on an agenda for the 1990's.

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